

Workplace Traffic Safety

This is Road-Safe Workplace, an electronic newsletter about workplace traffic safety from the Vermont Department of Labor because the number one cause of death and injury in the workplace are traffic crashes. Road-Safe Workplace has been created to distribute statistics, facts, and other materials to help employers create, maintain and improve their workplace traffic safety programs. Please use this information in your company newsletters, bulletin boards, or employee e-mail memos. Your thoughts and comments are always welcome. However, if you do not wish to receive Road-Safe Workplace, please reply with the word "unsubscribe" in the subject line.



(This edition of the Project Road-Safe Newsletter is devoted to "seat belts." While more Vermonters than ever before are wearing seat belts while driving their motor vehicles, a majority of the people killed in car and truck crashes were not wearing their seat belts despite the fact that the use of seat belts significantly reduces the number of highway fatalities. A few days ago it was reported that not enough Vermonters buckled up during the recent "Click It or Ticket" campaign thus depriving the state of some \$4 million in federal highway money. That report was followed by an editorial in a Vermont newspaper that we want to share with you.)

(This article was published in the July 6, 2006 edition of the Barre-Montpelier Times Argus.)

'Click It' campaign comes up short, \$4M lost

A statewide campaign aimed at getting Vermonters to buckle-up did convince more people to put on their seatbelts, but left the state short of its target and out of the running again for \$4 million the state would have been on pace to receive had it reached its goal.

"It's disappointing. At this point, we have done so many 'Click It' campaigns and publicized wearing a seatbelts so much, where is the common sense?" asked Charles Satterfield, a spokesman for the Governor's Highway Safety Program. "Why are Vermonters struggling so hard with the concept of buckling up?"

Vermont took part in the nationwide "Click It or Ticket" campaign, starting with a media and public education component followed by a two-week enforcement effort, which took place around the Memorial Day holiday.

The goal of the campaign was to increase seatbelt use in the state. According to a survey conducted just prior to the campaign, 78.7 percent of drivers and passengers in vehicles in Vermont were buckling up. As a result of the stepped-up enforcement campaign, highway safety advocates hoped to see that rate rise to 85 percent.

Had the 85 percent target seatbelt usage rate been achieved, the state would have been in line to take in an additional roughly \$4 million in federal funding for highway safety and transportation programs.

However, a recently completed post-campaign survey has revealed that while the rate has increased, it didn't increase as much as highway safety advocates had hoped.

The post-campaign survey found that 81.8 percent of drivers and passengers in vehicles in Vermont were using seatbelts, higher than the pre-campaign survey but under the 85 percent goal.

"It means we won't be getting the extra federal funding," Satterfield said.

To receive the federal funding, the state would have to achieve 85 percent seatbelt usage rates for two consecutive years. However, by not obtaining that rate this year, it pushes the state's eligibility for that federal funding back at least two more years.

"And we don't know how long that money is going to keep being available," Satterfield said.

Last year, following the "Click It or Ticket" campaign, the state registered an 84.7 percent seatbelt usage rate, just short of the 85 percent goal. Highway safety advocates were optimistic this year to achieve that target after coming so close last year.

Rutland City Police Lt. Kevin Geno said he was taken aback upon learning of the survey results Wednesday. "We're even lower than last year," he said. "That's disappointing. I just don't understand that."

Geno said people don't seem to be paying attention to buckling up as soon as they get inside a vehicle.

"We see it here with people traveling short distances," he said. "I don't understand why somebody wouldn't buckle up in this day and age."

Vermont State Police Lt. Bill O'Leary, traffic safety coordinator for the state Department of Public Safety, said he, too, was disappointed with the latest seatbelt survey results.

"We're disappointed because we know that approximately 62 percent of our fatalities this year are unbuckled," O'Leary said. "We don't like to see the bloodshed on our highways ... by increasing enforcement, getting the word out, and continued education, hopefully more people will buckle up."

Vermont has a mandatory seat belt law, although police must have probable cause for another moving violation before issuing a fine to someone in a vehicle for not buckling their seatbelt. The penalty is \$25 for the first offense, \$50 for the second one and \$100 for each additional offense.

In addition, the law requires anyone younger than age 8 to be restrained in a safety seat in a vehicle. Also, the law allows police to pull over a vehicle if anyone in it younger than 16 is not wearing a seat belt.

Generally, counties along the New Hampshire border are among the Vermont's lowest seatbelt usage rates. That's likely because New Hampshire has no seatbelt law for adult motorists, Satterfield said.

In addition, counties bordering New York typically have some of the better rates, because New

York has a primary seatbelt law, which allows police to pull over and ticket motorists not wearing seatbelts.

(The following editorial appeared in the Rutland Daily Herald on Monday, July 10, 2006)

Scofflaws should pay up

The recent Click it or Ticket campaign came up just short of its goal of having 85 percent of Vermonters wearing seat belts. During the enforcement and publicity campaign, coordinated by the National Highway Transportation Authority, just under 82 percent of those stopped were wearing their seat belts, down a fraction from the last such effort and about the national average.

Had the state reached 85 percent, Vermont would have been eligible for an additional \$4 million in federal highway money. More importantly, a number of people would have survived accidents in which they died and dozens more would have been spared injuries ranging from minor to serious and incapacitating.

Using 2003 numbers, in crashes where no injury was reported, 97 percent of the drivers were reportedly wearing seat belts.

In crashes with minor injuries, 87 percent of the drivers were reportedly wearing seat belts.

In crashes with incapacitating injuries, 85 percent of the drivers were reportedly wearing seat belts.

In crashes where someone died, 62.5 percent of the drivers were reportedly wearing seat belts.

In 2003, in Vermont alone, 24 people died in accidents and a further 158 had incapacitating injuries. Of those, 33 were not wearing restraints. Get seat belt use up to 90 percent, and half of those people would have walked away with minor injuries, at worst.

The cost to the families of those crash victims is not measurable. But the cost to the state is.

In 2000, the NHTSA pegged the economic costs alone of a roadway fatality at \$977,000; the costs associated with a critically injured crash survivor at \$1.1 million. If an additional 17 people a year walk away from crashes, that's \$17 million dollars. Add in the \$4 million we failed to get from the federal government in transportation funding, and the cost to the state exceeds \$20 million, just because a minority of drivers don't buckle up. According to Vermont Transportation numbers, the state has about 561,000 drivers, which means about 107,000 don't buckle up.

Right now, the state fine for failure to use a seat belt is \$25 for a first offense, but on average, the drivers who don't use belts are costing the state a little over \$180 each: \$20 million divided by 107,000. You do the math. So forget 25 bucks; let's start by charging them what they cost us. A \$180 ticket would be an incentive to wear a belt, and it would reflect the real-world cost to the state caused by failing to do so.

Unfortunately, Vermont police can't stop drivers for failing to wear a belt. Of the top 11 states in seat belt usage, 10 have primary restraint laws, which means their police can stop a car just because they see someone not using a belt. The state needs a primary restraint law.

The argument against such laws is that forcing people to use restraints violates their personal rights. But it's their kids' rights that should concern us.

Vermont law requires restraints for minors, and almost 90 percent of children in cars involved in accidents were in restraints. That's good, but not good enough. And as kids hit their middle teens, fewer and fewer wear belts. The message we're giving is clearly that restraints are for babies.

Then when they get cars of their own, there's a real problem. Fewer than 80 percent of people in their 20s involved in accidents in 2003 wore belts.

By modeling and enforcing good belt usage for everybody, our kids will get the message that seat belts are for adults, too.

And then more of Vermont's kids will grow up to have kids of their own.

Where Are We?

The following chart reflects the use of seat belts by Vermonters over the past nine years. The "Click It or Ticket" campaign was first introduced in 2002 and has been an annual event for the past five years. In the past two years, surveys have found that while seat belt use increased during the Click It Campaigns, the use rate fell off before the next campaign.

Year	Percentage of Seat Belt Use	Description
1998	62.7%	(New Survey Instrument Adopted)
1999	69.6%	
2000	61.6%	
2001	67.4%	
2002	66.3%	Pre-First Click It Campaign
2002	84.9%	Post First Click It Campaign
2003	82.4%	Post Second Click It Campaign
2004	79.4%	Post Third Click It Campaign
2004	79.9%	Post Labor Day Click It Campaign
2005	74.6%	Pre-Fourth Click It Campaign
2005	84%	Post Fourth Click It Campaign
2006	78.2%	Pre-Fifth Click It Campaign
2006	81.8%	Post Fifth Click It Campaign

The question remains: "What does this all mean?" The answers can be wide and varied and the numbers can be used in several ways, but the inescapable evidence shows that seat belt use in Vermont may well have hit the saturation point. That is, there will always be a certain percentage of motorists who will not use a seat belt, and right now it appears to be roughly about 20% of the Vermont motoring public. If this is true, that 20% will drive the ever-increasing costs of death and injury on Vermont's highways.

Keep in mind that 75% of the cost of a traffic crash is borne by those not directly involved in the crash. 50% of the cost of a motor vehicle crash is borne by private insurers. 15% is borne by uninvolved motorists delayed in traffic as well as charities and health care providers. Nearly 10% is borne by taxpayers who cover the costs of fire, police, and emergency medical personnel. 26% of the cost of a traffic crash is borne by the individual crash victims.

In Vermont, medical care costs as a result of traffic crashes are difficult to come by. However, police reports indicate that a significant number of motorists would have been less seriously injured in a motor vehicle crash had they been belted.

The Rutland Herald editorial called for a primary seat belt law in Vermont. Some of those who do not favor such a law say the police have other things to do than to issue tickets to unbelted drivers/passengers. Others say it is an infringement on personal freedom.

The question is, is operating a motor vehicle a right or a privilege? Does the legal requirement for a driver's license to operate a motor vehicle, or the requirement for inspections of motor vehicles and insurance coverage make driving a right or a privilege? What do you think?

Does a primary seat belt law infringe on personal rights or is it a necessary motor vehicle safety device such as brakes, lights, rear view mirrors, etc.? What do you think?

Will our police departments (local, county and state) spend too much time looking for seat belt violators? Shouldn't their enforcement of a primary seat belt law be considered part and parcel of their duty to protect the public? What do you think?

Perhaps the real question is, "With the knowledge that seat belts prevent serious injury and death, why wouldn't 95% (or more) of the motoring public wear them – or do they have a 'death wish'?" What do you think?

Employer Guidebook to Reduce Traffic Crashes

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), and Network of Employers for Traffic Safety (NETS) have joined forces to create ***Guidelines for Employers to Reduce Motor Vehicle Crashes***. This publication features a 10-step program to help employers improve traffic safety performance and minimize the risk of motor vehicle crashes. The document includes success stories from employers who have benefited from effective driver safety programs, including Pike Industries with operations in Vermont.

The booklet is available to employers from: njames@labor.state.vt.us. Ask for the ***Guidelines for Employers to Reduce Motor Vehicle Crashes***. The booklet will be sent in the mail, so be sure to include your mailing address. Or, employers may download the guide from http://www.osha.gov/publications/motor_vehicle_guide.pdf.

Inattention, speed, driving while impaired, disregard for stop signs and traffic lights, and failure to yield the right of way are the major causes of crashes on our highways.



**REMEMBER -- BUCKLE YOUR SEATBELT
EVERY TIME!**